

dissent



political writings on
culture - media - politics - capitalism

by the kids at UWS bankstown

editorial OR 'how to read'

this politico-zine is a conglomeration of opinions from very different people; but all agree on the point that society is far from perfect, and understanding why it is. This zine has been an attempt to talk about our lives, our politics and our passions in order to gain that 'understanding'. This zine (at least for us) is a step in the right direction. It is a movement forward.

The idea came from one person in particular who noted that there were a lot of cool people out there with really good ideas on society and it would be good to put all those ideas together. I agreed and decided to do my own version of putting that 'something' together.

I asked people to write about what they believed in, to challenge themselves and not necessarily write about something they knew, and I also reminded them politics isn't about getting it right. Its about seeing what's wrong, understanding why it is and then figuring out what to do about it. Having said that, it was basically up to their free spirit. It reflects the different levels that people think on, with their differing focal points in their work, and their deferent methods for understanding it.

In reading this people should not read like a by-stander, watching momentarily but then walking away. Instead I suggest that people make a connection: agree, dis-agree, extend the logic or critique it to shreds. Making a connection is productive, it allows you to be part of the text, where as reading is passive, you give up your right to exist by removing yourself from the text.

Other than this emails are provided if you want to contact the author, or if you wish to contribute for a second edition email me.

I'll be seeing you, davey (radgayboy@hotmail.com)

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Politics (a struggle of knowledge and confusion)

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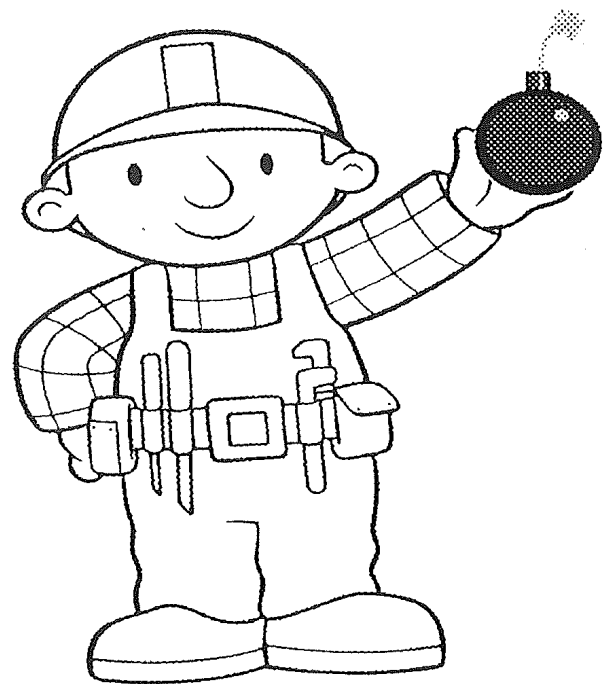
The task of writing this piece has been exceedingly difficult for me because I am constantly fighting the temptation to set down some of my beliefs and make conclusive statements. It is very difficult to write about nothing in particular and to make almost no grand assertions without lapsing into meaningless self-critical nonsense. The point of the paper was to explore confusion and uncertainty as a part of the political journey that everyone must take and perhaps to consider the role that 'truth' plays as a counterweight to our creeping fear of ignorance.

It is interesting that there is no word in the English language that denotes a lack of knowledge that does not have a negative connotation. Ignorance or uncertainty are the two words I use more often in this essay but perhaps the word that comes closest to describing what I mean by lack of knowledge is a word that encompasses irrationality, meaninglessness and lack of truth. .

I still identify myself as a post-modernist, although what meaning that phrase now holds for me is unclear. That fact of confusion underlying all the great political certainties of the world still does not reassure me that somehow, groping through the mire of history there has been for me some discovery. Instead what I have learned is that there is a certainty within the self-discovery of ones own political position more than anyone can ever teach or give away. However even that is eventually subject to the only great certainty that I have ever discovered and that is that there are no certainties in the universe. However that is no reason not to strive and, after all, what defines us more than anything else in the realm of politics is the 'attempt' to understand even in the

face of inevitable ignorance. Perhaps there is some good in the attempt, some virtue in striving for a truth that we can never attain. Perhaps there are rewards in it for us. I have certainly come to that conclusion but only after an arduous political journey that ended in a very strange place.

When I started off as a uni student I thought there was a lot that I needed to know. As I learned things I came to a point where this lack of knowledge took an almost tangible form in my mind and defined everything else. The problem was at this point that even an acknowledgement of personal ignorance was not enough to grasp the meaninglessness of searching for knowledge. Perhaps it was a reaction to suddenly finding myself in an institution that purports to produce 'knowledge' by some process that is handed down like the Promethean flame from teacher to student. I tried to see something of that flame



but only found a charade. The empty gestures of those who pretend to know believing all the time that there pretense is all that keeps the great sea of oblivion from crashing down upon us all. That somehow their charades will light us and keep away the creeping shadows of our ignorance.

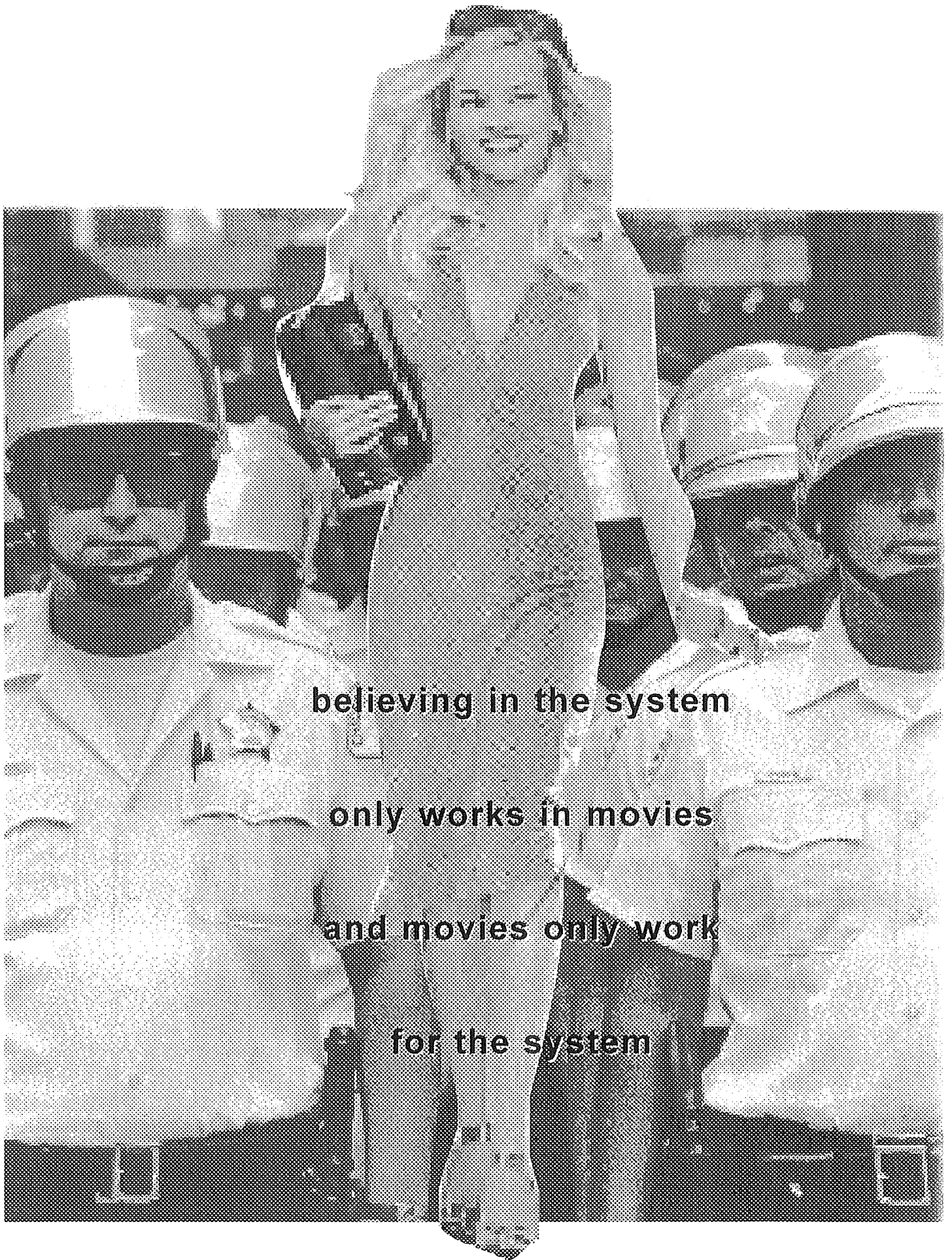
It bothered me though that I could not find some sort of conclusion and I have always struggled to find some place where I could put my faith. Being a Queer as well as a semi-anarchistic postmodernist does not make life easy if one is looking for a 'knowledge' that can be trusted. The church, the state, the law, the Students' Association, they were all the same in the end. Manufacturers of half truths that generate an undeserved power and create transitory eddies in the whirlpool of history. In the end there was no bedrock of knowledge upon which I could put my faith. Nothing that I could be told and believe. Everyone and everything had an agenda.

However even amidst great confusion there is a burning desire to understand things that eventually proves inevitable. Human beings want to know 'the truth' and if they cannot know the truth they will make something up and call it the truth because they want to feel as though they know the truth even if 'the truth' is that they cannot know that. We are funny that way as a species. I suspect that is because 'the truth' is not some object that exists out there but is rather a weapon fabricated by humans to serve human ends. What truth has ever just existed without having fulfilled some human need? Truth is something we created out of need and thus it is something we cannot destroy. A human truth is like a human face, it is a projection of something out of ourselves that tells others who we are. It is an outward statement of our place in society and the world. Our truths make us who we

are and as I think about it, it probably would not have bothered me so much if I had not always had such a firm desire to believe in some sort of truth. After all, when the day is done, the darkest hour gives way to dawn. So in a sense I find myself waiting for that dawn to rise and for me to realise that all of this time there was this place where I could have been where all the faults of human beings and all of the confusions and frustrations take their proper context. Their ignorance gives way to truth and the political path to take is realised.

There are many people who would gladly show me the road that I must take, who would explain and draw things out in reference to some grand revelation that was made long ago by some dead person whose name has not been forgotten. But they always forget something, there is always a gap in even the most confident explanation that somehow we have to be willing to ignore otherwise the whole thing starts to fall apart. That is perhaps why I have always gravitated to the teachings of certain nihilist authors who did not make grandiose statements about the nature of truth but rather enjoyed peeping through tiny gaps in the epistemological wall to see what they could see. I suppose the political gift with which I have been bestowed is the political eye to see through fabricated answers and to resist the 'will to truth'. After all if there is one thing being Queer tells you it's that other people don't always have all the answers even though you may wish that they did.

The difficulty comes when you try to take anything from that revelation and set yourself up with some idea that seems great. After all, I have a desire to effect a change in the status quo just like everybody else. But it's hard to do that without knowledge because knowledge is the very key to power. Without some form of belief there can be no change and



believing in the system

only works in movies

and movies only work

for the system

therefore no politics. So how does one reconcile the two opposing concepts? I can't give anybody else's answer to that question, only my own. But I can say that in my own experience I have resisted the urge to compromise my politics right up to this, the eleventh hour. My analysis of the political ideas that I have encountered is individual, if nothing else, and I believe that that does count for something because politics is a function of human beings and therefore part of the natural function of a human being is the development of politics as a way of developing as a person.

That makes the task of politics much more difficult for those of us who engage in it every day. The truth is not some abstract entity that we can remove from human beings like an appendix. Rather it is a part of us and we cannot remove it without fundamentally changing ourselves. Bearing in mind that a person's truth is tied to their life experiences and the circumstances of their life makes for the soberest realisation of them all. That we cannot change a person's view of the world merely by telling them what they should believe. Rather it just has to happen, and somehow we have to make it happen without being exactly sure where to start and how to go about it.

What does this say about 'truth'? I suppose though I am not sure, that it means that a person is made up of the things that they believe in most deeply and whether we realise those as being political or not is the crucial question that defines our relationships in society. We exist in a matrix of political questions that blurs and washes into an ocean of questions that all have to do with a grand striving for some knowledge in the world that we may never know, but which grants us a glimpse at what it means to be truly human. The political matrix that some people believe is the only justification for seeking truth exists ever as a

substantial part of that struggle but it goes beyond our attempts to clearly understand and even beyond the attempts of those who would impose understanding on others.

My advice to those who feel that they need to share the 'truth' with others is to challenge the truth and to see whether it stands up to your scrutiny. Unless we challenge ourselves we can never know the validity of what we say. Of course challenging our cherished beliefs is always hard and sometimes we just don't feel like bothering with it, when certainty offers us the easy road to action and success. The problem is that unchallenged ideas stagnate quickly and become dead dogma. I am not going to proscribe a process for coming at the truth (I leave that to my lecturers). Instead I would suggest that the true sign of a person who is reconciled with uncertainty is one who accepts the truth of others for what they are, nothing more than an inevitable attempt at engaging the world and inevitably flawed.

The question of knowledge does not lead me to any real 'conclusion'. The purpose of this paper was to explore a little bit my own political motivations and perhaps to come to understand why I have made the political choices that I have. In hindsight I don't think my doubts about being 'on the left' were ever hard to see. It just seems as though because I went through the motions nobody noticed my apprehensions about some of the fundamental aspects of left doctrine (particularly where it concerned methodology and strategy). But there is no point griping about that now, those days are over and a new day has dawned. However the old questions are still there.

In an election year... Words on Media, Politics and Mass

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Once again the electioneering onslaught has begun. It is 'an election year', the stakes are set high and the opposing sides are ready for war. The prize for the winner is nothing less than control of a nation, and every seat will count for the number crunchers who play on margin's, statistics and opinion poll's to obtain that winning edge. And at the same time the speculation of a winner has already begun, and Mark Latham seems to be the shoe in.

To paraphrase one political speculator: Howard's popularity has fallen, after giving the public GST, war and locking up refugees it seems that the 'old fox's' name is attached to too many negatives, where as Latham, the 'young lion' has already begun to show his leadership skills to the people. Latham makes the right choices, and he stands behind them, most of all he's not afraid to take on a challenge. But what is interesting to note is that the speculations had begun before the election date was called, but there is still a strange sense of certainty to the statement. Fact becomes destiny and the media become the prophet of the new regime.

The media has become a lynch pin in deciding elections. Should this be so surprising if we consider the high control of information and legitimacy that newspapers and television broadcast's hold? Noam Chomsky once gave a formula to understand the way in which media narrates information. He showed that the media always finds an enemy (a villain), personalizes the story and will explain over and over again *what* happens but will never explain *how* it happened. Causation and understanding is left out for endless details

and sensationalist political drama.

While this gives us insights into general media coverage of 'events' how insightful is this for explaining what happens during elections? To begin the 'villain' acts more as a temporary label. While the media can say definitely that Osama is evil, the villainy of politicians is only applicable until the opposition does something worse. To move on to 'personification' we see the politicians continuously trying to get into contact with the 'every day Australian'. The politician will be found at public events, be photographed kicking a ball and be seen wearing a mining hat, yet at the same time he achieves all this while wearing a suit in order to maintain his professionalism. There is a tension between seducing the public imagination and maintaining an aura of authority. And finally, while the last two have been modified, we see that the *what* still maintains its superiority over the *how*. The media will print vox pop's of peoples opinions, they will print pie graphs of voting break ups in the electorate. There will be no deeper understanding of what causes societies social problems, how the parties' strategies will address these issues. There are only images, there is no depth.

Any party platform becomes filtered and distorted through the media industry in order to achieve their prime objective of the 'sale'. They act on the one hand to present an unbiased view to 'inform' people, while on the other act to 'represent' the opinions of a readership. At both acts they are successful only when these notions are not challenged. Their promise of neutrality is unfounded, and the 'facts' are highly speculative. Irrespectively

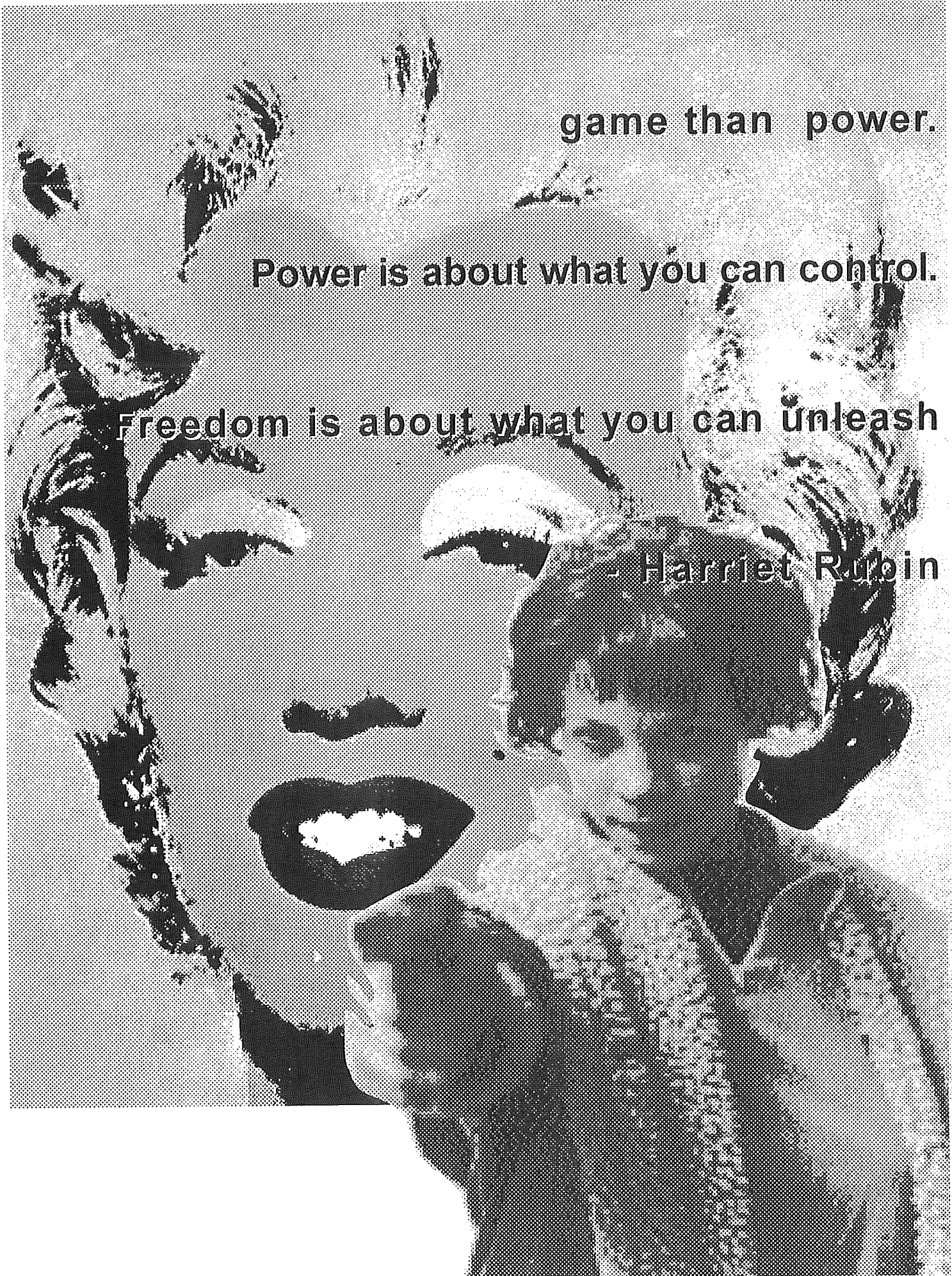
"Freedom is actually a bigger

game than power.

Power is about what you can control.

Freedom is about what you can unleash

- Harriet Rubin



this does not stop their articles from being taken as true, in fact the only time the 'facts' are questioned is when they are in contradiction to a competing newspaper. But what makes the media insidious is that when they are not questioned the media gains a large degree of legitimacy in the consumption of its ideas, so much so that the reverse becomes true and the paper begins to 'speak for the people'. It becomes the majority opinion by default. Mass media can become the art critic for political arena, where they act in an objective capacity to pass judgment on politicians for the people themselves, yet their own interests and position requires just as much criticism for the very fact that it is presented as an objective opinion.

Today politics is played out in the media, and must obey the laws defined by the press. Demographics and image play a central role, replacing the previous focus of policy and platform in winning an election. Policies are still there but an image of, say, Latham reading to school children, will speak more loudly than a 200-word article on his feelings on education. News stories will read like fairy tales, the young brave prince will slay the evil king, and the people will benefit because of it. Most important issues are now sold by parties to get votes in the same way that papers cover stories: to get sales. The catch cry for the careerist politician is make it big, make it flashy, make it newsworthy.

Politicians are actors. The American president Ronald Reagan, a former actor, who despite unpopularity made office twice, was the first to illustrate this so clearly. But the critical question to ask is what allows such a condition to occur? The answer lies in the fact that politics today has become a 'mass politics' as much as media today is 'mass media'. The law of 'mass' is that of isolated individuals

who are labeled and grouped not through their own actions and words, but instead by institutions to which we are co-joined. It is the extension of the factory line logic into liberal democracy and media. We vote for parties like isolated individuals on a production line, each contributing a small component for the larger machine. We read papers that will tell us what is in fashion, what is of interest and what is of importance to us instead of allowing the readership to determine this themselves.

In both instances they deal with people as consumers, 'the potential voter' and 'the potential reader' are the sole concern of the 'mass' industries, both pander to supposed individuals who are understood through demographics and who are sold dreams that never become reality. The idea is to make the sale. Politicians care as much about breaking promises as a theatre owner cares about people walking out of a movie after it has started. once you've paid they've already succeeded and they deny any culpability due to a matter of 'taste'.

The audience of the party or the media enters a strange relationship of being spoken for by the party/media itself. Politics becomes the sale of votes, which is also the sale of voices. Once your voice is sold through the vote there is no space given again in the political system for answerability of the party. Nor is there a space given for control of the decisions of the party, the entire state enters a fixed term contract selling away your right to dissent.

The key issue here is representation, there are two senses in which the word representation can be taken, each with its own particular meaning. The first form would be to 'act as', this is where the representative would act in the place of the people whom they represent. This is the form of the current political system.

where a politician can say that they speak for the majority of Australia. The second form of the word is to 'act for', to act only to re-present the interests of those you act for. This requires that the actual decision to be made by those who are being acted for. Here the representative defers decision-making capacity to the group itself. The difference can be seen as one of answerability, of communication and of particular groupings being allowed decide themselves what would be the best method to move forward as a group.

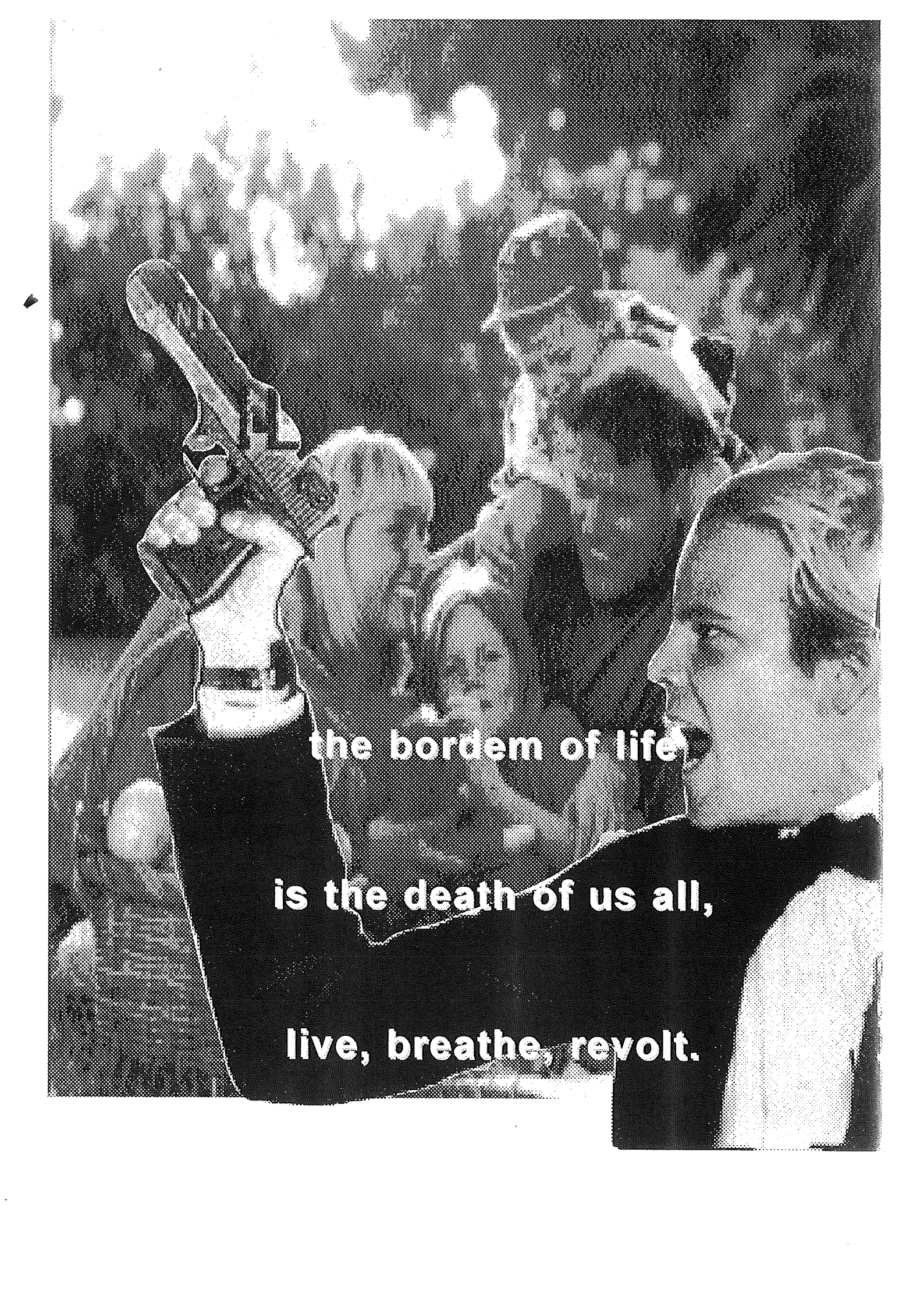
The media takes a different root; to buy into the media is the sale of your interests. They tell you what to think, and if you happen to disagree your letter of dissent may appear in the letters page as a consolation prize. Media takes another twist, given its position between parties and individual it can also act to characterize the 'silent majority' to the party. The carefully chosen polling questions that only allow yes or no answers, and editorials take on unique properties of acting as the peoples voice, occasionally beating politicians at their own game. Given this we must realize that while Chomsky's *propaganda* model of information is useful it is limited by the fact that it does not take its own logic to the full extension. It is no good to ask the critical question of *how* within media issues if we do not apply the *how* to the media itself.

Media can no longer be talked about in terms of accuracy and truthfulness. Arguments such as these fail to realize that the media is able to exploit the differences of opinions in order to keep the focus directed on the issue and not the structure of mass media. It is the act of seduction, entice the reader and distract them from the true interests invested in the press. The seduction is so strong that many people fail to recognize that it is not the people's press, it is owned by a few individuals within

the elite of society. The only true strategy in challenging the media is to recognize its pyramidal structure of existence; its direct and one-way relationship from the heights of heaven to the mythical 'everyday man' [sic]. Media must loose its 'mass' in order to allow the free flow of information once promised to us by the Internet. Likewise, counter-media must not reconstitute the structure of 'mass media'.

Labor or Liberal, Telegraph or Herald, Yes or No, in all three situations the problem we face is always the same 'make your decision, even though it makes little difference'. You loose the ability to have any meaningful or sustained participation in the decision making process. And once you make the choice you defer any possibility to dissent, the only trace of your participation is as a statistic on the electoral polls. The engagement with this argument on media and political systems may not seem to be important, after all, some may say we are not yet a fascist state. To take this line of thought immediately leads to fictitious security. As those of the Frankfurt school have shown: the 'Mass' society of the present has allowed the possibility of fascism; an ideology that will continue to hang over our heads until we recognize its apathetic grasp on our society.





the borden of life

is the death of us all,

live, breathe, revolt.

Anarcho-Communism:

A Marxist variant which attempts to counter the counter-revolutionary revolutionary

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Anarcho-Communism is a political theory which dates back to the late 1800's and particularly early 20th century, where people both from Europe and the Americas identifying themselves as communists, anarchists and socialists understood the abolition of the state as paramount in a revolutionary process for the working class to successfully take control of the means of production and establish a truly free, classless society.

As communists we understand the class struggle to be the dynamic 'engine of history' (Marx).

We understand the abolition of private property to be the central theme in our historic battle against abstractions which alienate us and convert us into objects.

In our endeavor for the realization of species-being, understanding our commonality with others, we also see and celebrate the diversity of our species, which must unite under its commonality for itself and in itself.

We understand the means of production to be crucial in our victory, and the establishment of a classless society with all its seemingly impossible promises to be realized and made possible when the economy is ours in the making.

We believe the revolution to be a process of struggle, a string connecting us with others in our time and with our ancestors whom fighting to survive allowed us to live. Contrary to the idea of revolution as an explosive violent coupe of state or transitional elected finality, with and by an intelligentsia, which professes to know the answers to humanity.

The adjective Anarcho is the defining variant to distinguish this political position from other more traditional Marxists, state socialists and vanguard communists. These positions, more or less, put the emphasis and key to revolutionary victory on the acquisition and re-organisation of the state in all its manifestations, historically represented through the Party. Of course, it is accompanied with much rhetoric about the workers controlling the state and the 'Peoples Party', but it would be historically inaccurate to suggest this has ever been the case in any socialist country, past or present. Nor that the state, a bureaucratized administrative counter-revolutionary machine, could ever liberate when its very existence precludes exploitation and forms of oppression.

Unfortunately, the hijacking of revolutionary theory and processes by Leninists, determined to apprehend the state as a liberatory force which will teach the working class 'child' to be cooperative with this 'brave new state', has demanded for anarcho-communists to distinguish themselves from the dogma of Marxist-Leninists.

It is important to state here that we are not opposed to organising or organizations, nor to the expression of leadership, but to confuse organising with party forms of organisations with state power as their goal is the Leninist trap we are attempting to escape. To reduce leadership to the cult of personality, to that of an enlightened benevolent elite, which pretends to know us better than we know ourselves, is the concept shared by those whom

dream themselves our masters.

And here lies the schism between what I shall broadly term 'state socialists' (including all known forms of left-wing political theories and organizations from communist parties to social-democratic parties) which view the state as a means (which will whither away) to an end (which never arrives), and those whom demand the states meaningful end.

State socialists are mostly sincere in their quest for equality yet preoccupied with expressing and creating this through their own perverted abstraction, trapped by their own limitations to view the world and its possibilities through the narrow prism of the party and the state. 'What could the state do if only our party was in power?' is the question which they pin all their hopes onto, ignoring the inherent limitations and corruption of state power. Trapped in their own abstractions, the party as an end in itself, foreclosing the possi-

bility of revolutionary change.

As Anarcho-communists our goals differ to this Leninist expression of suspicion towards our class, our goals differ in the scope of what we understand as possible by our class.

It is not our goal to acquire fairer wages, nor secure more funding for health and education, nor to continuously demand for the ruling class to tread more softly on the backs of the bruised, ironically using the state as the mechanism to manifest these goals. We aspire to the abolition of the wages system, to the expropriation of health care and education institutions by its staff and community, running it for themselves as they always new they could, and for the downtrodden to straighten their bent backs and overthrow the ruling

cut for peace



class and its mode of operation, the state.

We know it not to be possible to use the state for these purposes, for the state exists to uphold a status quo, depends on exploitation and oppression for its very existence, and has an inherent suspicion of radical change, expressing a virile contempt for the working class and its revolutionary aspirations.

It is difficult to imagine oneself as part of a class, because one must look around, beyond the geo-political barriers of the nation-state, and one's vision must transcend time and look to our mothers and fathers in our past, with similar struggles in which we owe our lives to.

Space and time are overcome with class consciousness. And so, it is difficult for an individualized, alienated abstraction to imagine itself as part of our class, a lineage of ancestors, us, the re-producers of life (species). Us, with our hands and minds we created/produced the world of humans, and the story of how our work, manual and intellectual, has been stolen by that other class of men, whom throughout history have oppressed our ancestors, our class. It is the bitterest, longest war, class conflict, which has got us here in the world of 2004. Our exploited labour, the key to the reproduction of life and real power, its appropriation and coercion the ruling class depend on more than anything. Its liberation (labour power) we demand as our highest goal, not its further coercion and discipline by a nicer, fairer state. For the state exists as the administrator and enforcer of this historic theft of labour power, it is the choice organisation of the power obsessed and can only continue to exist by imposing coercion.

Against the abstraction of capital, state and party must we struggle to truly free the pro-

ductive and creative potential of labour power, of our species. Labour power, the magical weapon which all forms of abstracted power salivate over and aspire to control. To harness this (labour) power is to command history.

A power more powerful than any bomb or any machine, for both its destructive and creative potential. Its productive essence sought after by the usurpers, from which nothing can come, neither bombs nor machines, not even life.

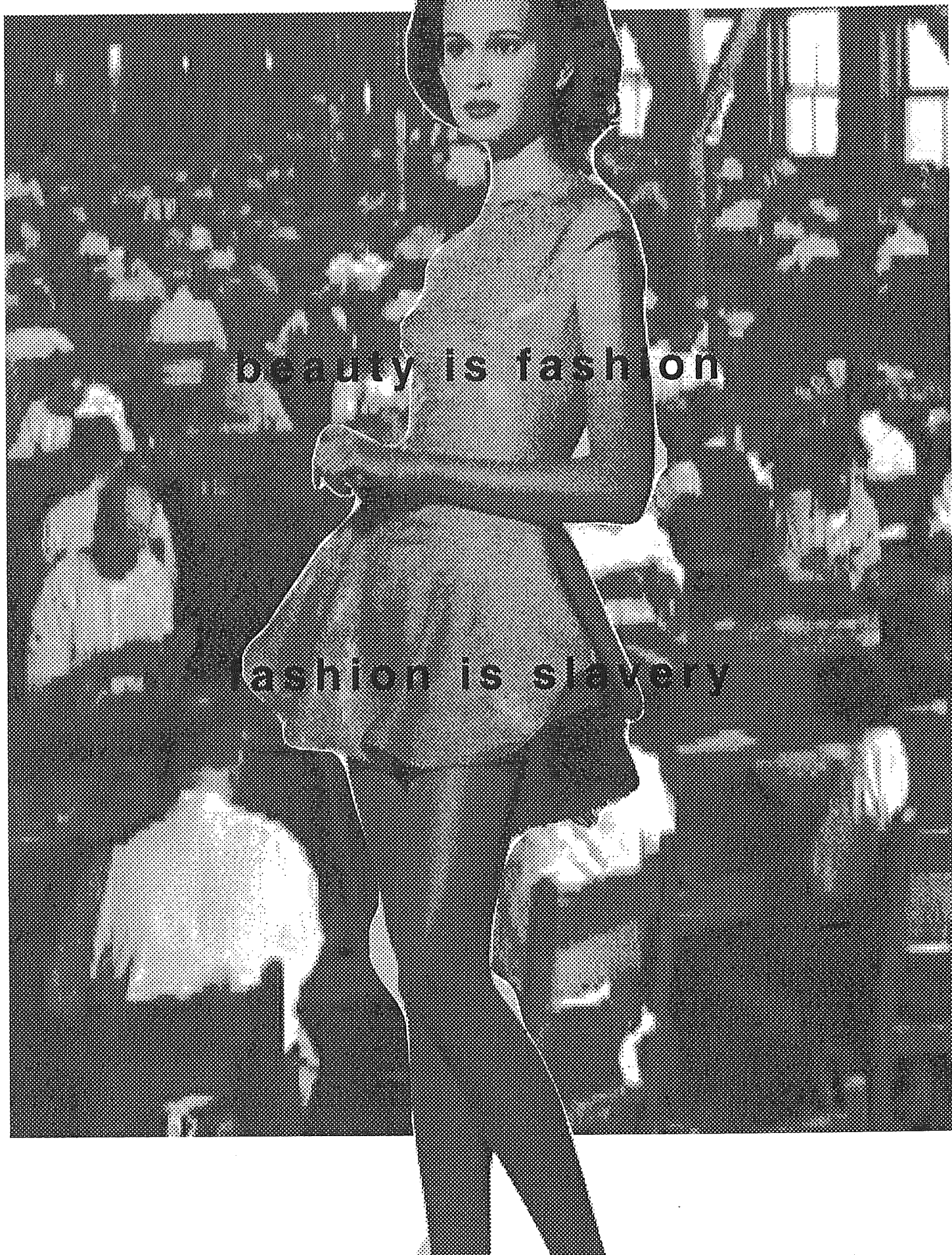
This power, labour power, which we hold in our collective grasp and which we are only made aware of in class consciousness must we use to create the best of all possible worlds and to struggle to never allow shameless capitalists nor self-professed state socialists to control.

Labour power holds the secret to liberation or further oppression.

It is the coercion by the powerful (made powerful by this usurped labour power) throughout history which manifests class, and hence the abolition of these usurpers and the free creative expression of labour power is our goal of a classless society.

We must grow deaf to their thousand year lies convincing us that we are too stupid to direct our own desires, that we are too greedy to cooperate amongst ourselves, that we need them to hold our hands when it is really them whom need our hands to hold them up.

The revolution is here, and has always been here, with us, literally in our hands.



beauty is fashion

fashion is slavery

Smashing the Dream:

Why the glitter of capitalism is an altar not worth the sacrifice...

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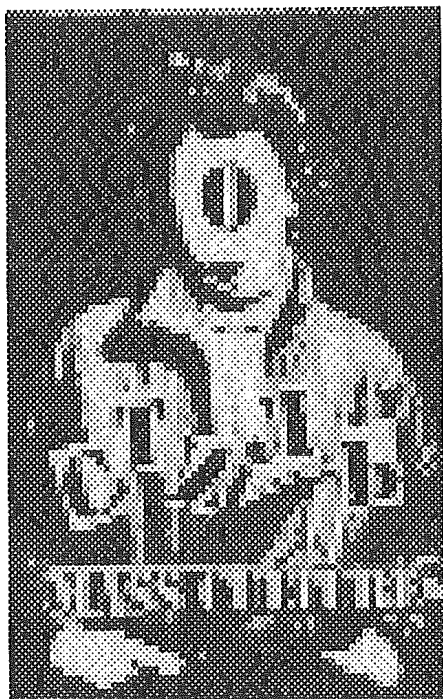
"Civil disobedience is not our problem. Our problem is civil obedience. Our problem is that numbers of people all over the world have obeyed the dictates of the leaders of their government and have gone to war, and millions have been killed because of this obedience. . . Our problem is that people are obedient all over the world in the face of poverty and starvation and stupidity, and war, and cruelty. Our problem is that people are obedient while the jails are full of petty thieves, and all the while the grand thieves are running the country. That's our problem."

—Howard Zinn, "Failure to Quit", p. 45

All is not as it seems... This paper is a response to the hypothetical question "why should one become involved in social struggle?", and in particular seeks to address why we should resist the oppressive and suicidal world-view of capitalism. As the above quotation highlights, 'our problem' is not that people are disobedient, 'strange' or rebellious but rather, that they are comfortable, that they are calm, accepting, and peaceful and furthermore plead the insanity of those who seek to explain that 'peaceful' obedience is actually an act of violence.

I refer here, in fact not to a calm of peace, but to an easy acceptance that sits over those exploited by capitalism like a fog. This is not a fog inherent within people but is instead a creation of capitalist popular culture, that friendly beast that suggests to all of us that we should escape from the problems of 'society at large' - and indeed that we should defer all power and responsibility for these problems - and instead wallow in the splendid offerings of corporations; new clothes, new cars, new TV programs, new stereos, new bathrooms,





new toilets, new orange peelers, new hair, new nails, new façade of store-bought individuality...

It is difficult to escape from the dictates of capitalist culture wherein all that is profitable, and individual, is projected throughout our life environs all hours of the day. The key point is that capitalist popular culture exploits us and robs our imagination of alternative values, goals and ideas. Let's look at some of the ways that this happens...

In 'traditional' accounts of capitalism the simple formula applies that capital is invested in production processes, wherein labour (surplus) value is exploited, and returned to the investors of capital. Hence when you and I work for a corporate entity, we create value through our work which is then stolen by our bosses who merely give us a meagre proportion in return (wages). What is happening here, is we are paying our bosses to tell us what to do.

However, in the contemporary transnational economy such direct exploitation is complemented by more abstract methods of capital accumulation. Firstly, profit no longer depends on production. So virtual are contemporary finance markets that some 1,200 billion dollars are traded daily in purely speculative investments in national currencies and the like, and hence money need never be invested in actual productions of commodities in order to create profit. Of course this is a system that is obviously 'by the rich-for the rich'.

Secondly - and this is the part that relates to capitalist *popular culture* - commodity fetishism in the 'First World' has reached unforeseen potentials for the extraction of profit in 'new' ways. Perhaps one of the most useful locations to envisage this process is in the realm of 'high fashion' and luxury goods. As Jacques-Franck Dossin, our friendly fuck-wit 'luxury goods analyst' at the corporation Goldman Sachs explains:

"Luxury goods are at least three times as expensive as similar products. So, if these companies start to fight on prices, they are dead. The most important thing is to create this brand to enable the pricing."(1)

So there you have it, straight from the thief's mouth; luxury goods companies create an artificial lie, an 'aura' of prestige for their commodities - or more accurately, their brands - through a heavy investment in the 'semiotic colonisation' of the popular imaginary (they tell us what's cool, so we'll spend heaps on their 'cool shit'). If a company chose to sell their products at cheaper prices (closer to their actual worth) and compete with the others, the whole mirage would come undone.

Of course, the mirage-like dream of capital applies not only to luxury goods but also to products as banal as coffee or shoes, which in the international economy are often wholly divorced (as signifiers) from their points of production and are imbued with an artificial 'mystique' or promise of taste and success, which enable an over-valuation and hence profit. In many ways, this valuation, wherein commodities are invested with supra-natural qualities, operates by way of it's imbrication within a wider mythology of the promises of material consumption; the simulacrum of *progress*.

The global context...

One of the important things about capitalist popular culture is the constant pressure for the realms of actual production to remain hidden. See it's fine and dandy to go to Sportsgirl or Myers or whatever, and pick out the latest fashion clothing (ultra-cool and over-valued), but you never going to see pictures in the store of the people who actually made the clothes, or their shit wages, or the conditions they work in.

One of the ways we can picture the 'hidden faces' of those who actually make the commodities that we use to adorn our bodies and our homes, is to understand the 'commodity chains' that link us to them. Along these commodity chains, people are consistently ripped off by their bosses at every point, right up to our own exploitation when we buy the damn things. Take a cup of coffee; now you may buy a cup of 'Indulgence' coffee or some-such-shit and pay simply for the fancy packaging, so your being exploited. But think of the workers who put the coffee jar on the shelves, the workers at the cash register as you leave the store, the workers who collect your trolley when you dump it in the car park, the workers who made the coffee jars, the

workers who packed, trucked and shipped the coffee, the farmers who grew the coffee and get a pittance for their labour... And out of this we can see the power of exploited labour to create social abstractions that are totally alienated from the power of the workers themselves.

We can see here that all the way along the chain, the worker subsidises the lives of those further up the chain. For example, internationally women perform a huge amount of unwaged labour in poorer households – day-to-day activities such as child raising, food production, and health care – which are imperative to the survival of those within the household and which are often undervalued by a patriarchal division of labour. Whilst this labour may be 'externalised' from production and consumption in a global market it is still the case that those at 'higher nodes' of the commodity chain benefit directly, as this labour indirectly subsidises the production of everything from shoes to car parts.

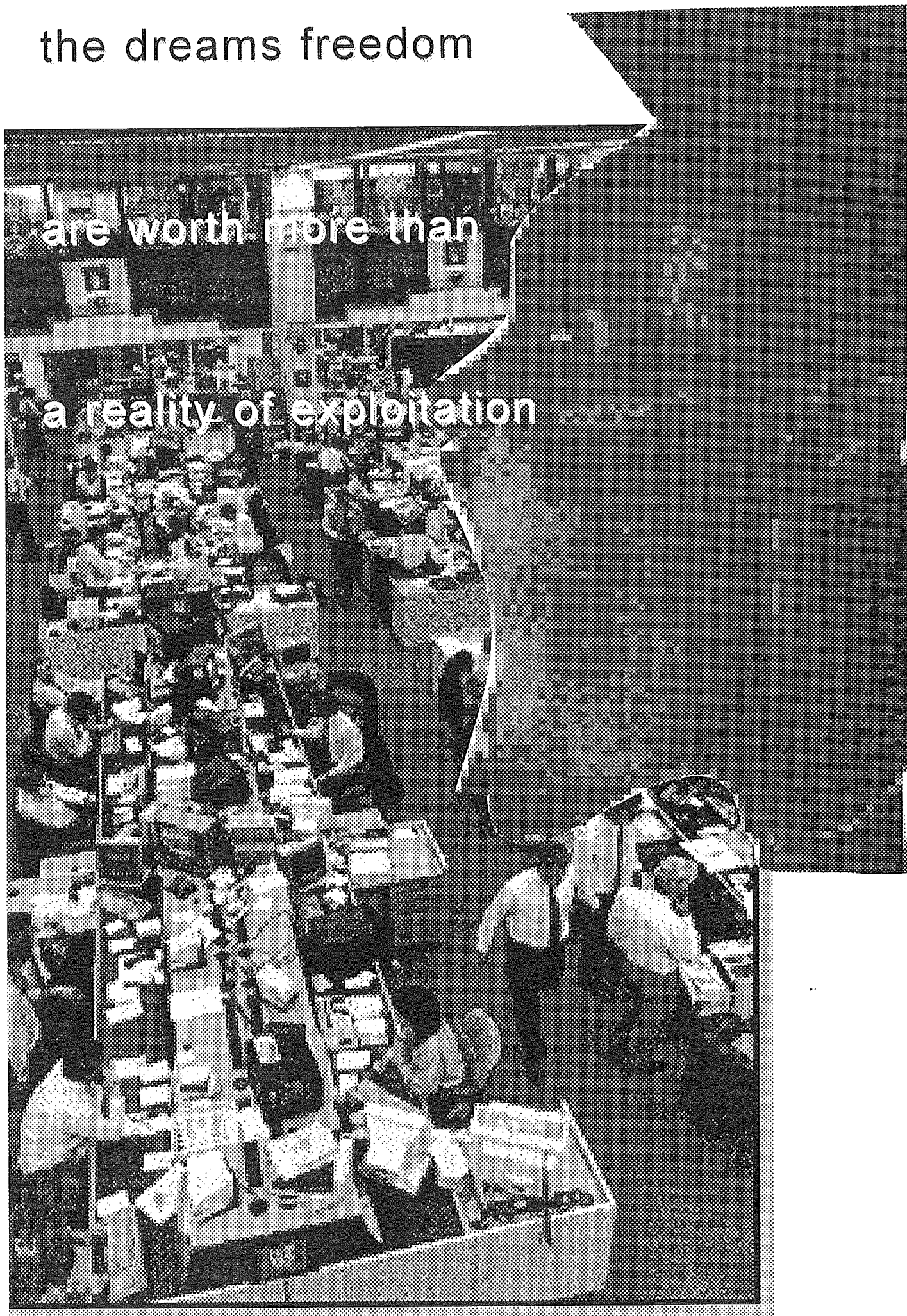
All of this is exactly the reason why capitalist popular culture pretends that we all live like the stars of the *Friends* TV show, and our products just appear magically on the shelf at the store. It is important to understand that capitalism is a *global* phenomena, and that corporations in the 'First World' constantly exploit people in other countries to sell us things we don't need. As Gayatri Spivak writes:

"it is profoundly enabling and useful to rethink the present relationship between the 'Third' and 'First' worlds through Marxist accounts of the globalisation of capital and the international division of labour." 'Marxist' thought relies on; "the possibility of suggesting to the worker that the worker produces capital because the worker, the contain-

the dreams freedom

are worth more than

a reality of exploitation



er of labour power, is the source of value. By the same token it is possible to suggest to the so called 'Third World' that it *produces* the wealth and the possibility of cultural self-representation of the 'First World'."(2)

Again, capitalism demands that we look at profitable lies and constantly *away* from poverty in the so-called 'Third World'. We are very rarely reminded that today 2.8 billion people live on less than two dollars a day, and some 800 million people are suffering from malnutrition at any given moment: these people are simply 'off the radar'. They may as well be on mars. I believe that this because our role, within a global capitalist economy - and as relatively well off consumers - is to buy the shit made purely for profit...

This is the reason why I believe that many of us say; "why should I struggle? Life isn't so bad for me, even if I hate my boss...": because we are subjected to a vast panacea of Western symbology - of images, texts, graphics and stories - that are distorted in such a way as to look *away* from the realm of production - particularly if production occurs in the so-called 'developing countries' - and towards the 'promised land' of success; the 'dead-heart-dream' of white, rich suburbia.

I believe it's eminently true to say that the news, entertainment and advertising of capitalist media are markedly distorted towards the lives of the (globally located) affluent few. AngloAmerican faces, and the 'trials and tribulations' of the rich are far more prominent than those of the poor. Terrorism in the United States is far more important than in Nicaragua, makeup clad bourgeois families on *Days of Our Lives* are far more 'interesting' than the dreary tread of poverty in Tanzania, the death of millions from malnutrition is a distant shadow to the all-important

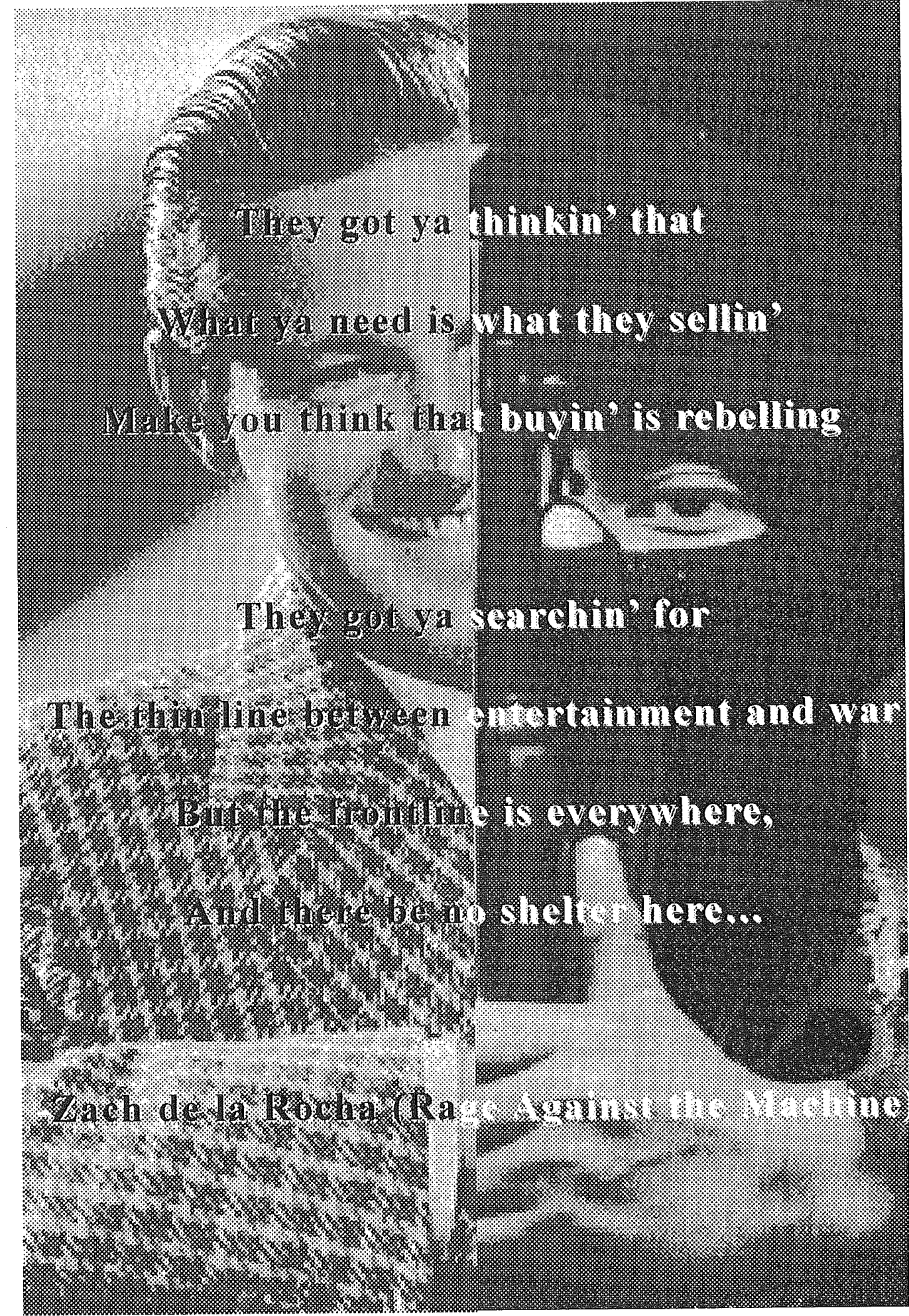
diet programs and body infatuations of Hollywood...

We should be able to acknowledge that in fact, there is indeed a crisis present here - whilst capitalists wish us to pretend there isn't - we should acknowledge the ways in which the material comforts of affluent households, the detritus in the bottom of our coffee cups and the tread of leather which enwraps our soles are all implicated within a global relationship of power, an exploitation that barely raises a static on the calm monotony of our television screens.

This is not to suggest that capitalism is simply a monolithic imposition of violence - it is that- but it is also a process that imposes a series of banal representations of what it means to succeed in life. And it is these lies, the artificial dreams, which fuel and distort the almost hegemonic 'progress fetishism' that serves as a conceptual and historical backdrop to the continuing existence of capitalism... And it is this fog that we should destroy, actively, and in all spheres of our lives.

Perhaps one would question whether or not capitalist popular culture is capable of the systematic discipline required for a near-constant 'framing' of our social views in such a way as I am suggesting here. How is it possible that all these different institutions work together, the media, the corporate PR company, the advertising company, the shopping centre creators etc? Surely, they are not seeking to dupe us and steal from us... They are merely people going about their day-to-day employment.

What is crucial here is that I believe we lack a profound inability to carry out any temporal or spatial 'de-centering'; that is, we find it difficult to comprehend how our social life will



**They got ya thinkin' that
What ya need is what they sellin'
Make you think that buyin' is rebelling**

**They got ya searchin' for
The thin line between entertainment and war
But the frontline is everywhere,
And there be no shelter here...**

Zach de la Rocha (Rage Against the Machine)

look to others in the future, or even people in other places. And without that reflexivity... We simply fail to notice things.

For example; if there is a group of people that forces other people to work twelve hour days (and longer), in harsh conditions and does not provide them with enough to live on, or for their family... Then is this group of people (a) white slave owners in 18th Century United States?, (b) Military overseers in forced work camps in Stalinist USSR?, (c) the Nike corporation today, or (d) all of the above.

And of course, the answer to this question is, (d) all of the above. But the really scary thing is that we pay good money to buy clothes which actually promote the Nike corporation... Now hopefully, in the future people will look back at this and question the supposed ethics and wisdom of our time...

As I have said, I believe that the reasons why we are incapable of understanding the nature of corporate theft and brutality, is that capitalist institutions wish us to look away. Simply put, we are subjected to corporate propaganda all the time; after all the greedy nature of business is widely acknowledged, especially by the rich.

From dreams to acts of rejection and rebellion...

I believe that most people understand that capitalism is unsustainable; that it undermines the eco-systems on which we depend for life, and that it can never offer freedom from exploitation for the poor, let alone the mirage of *riches* for all. However, even whilst most people understand this, regimes of truth as embedded as the capitalist dream is, will die

very hard... And even when their possibilities in reality fall away they will remain as a simulacra to guide people anyway. As Gilbert Rist explains:

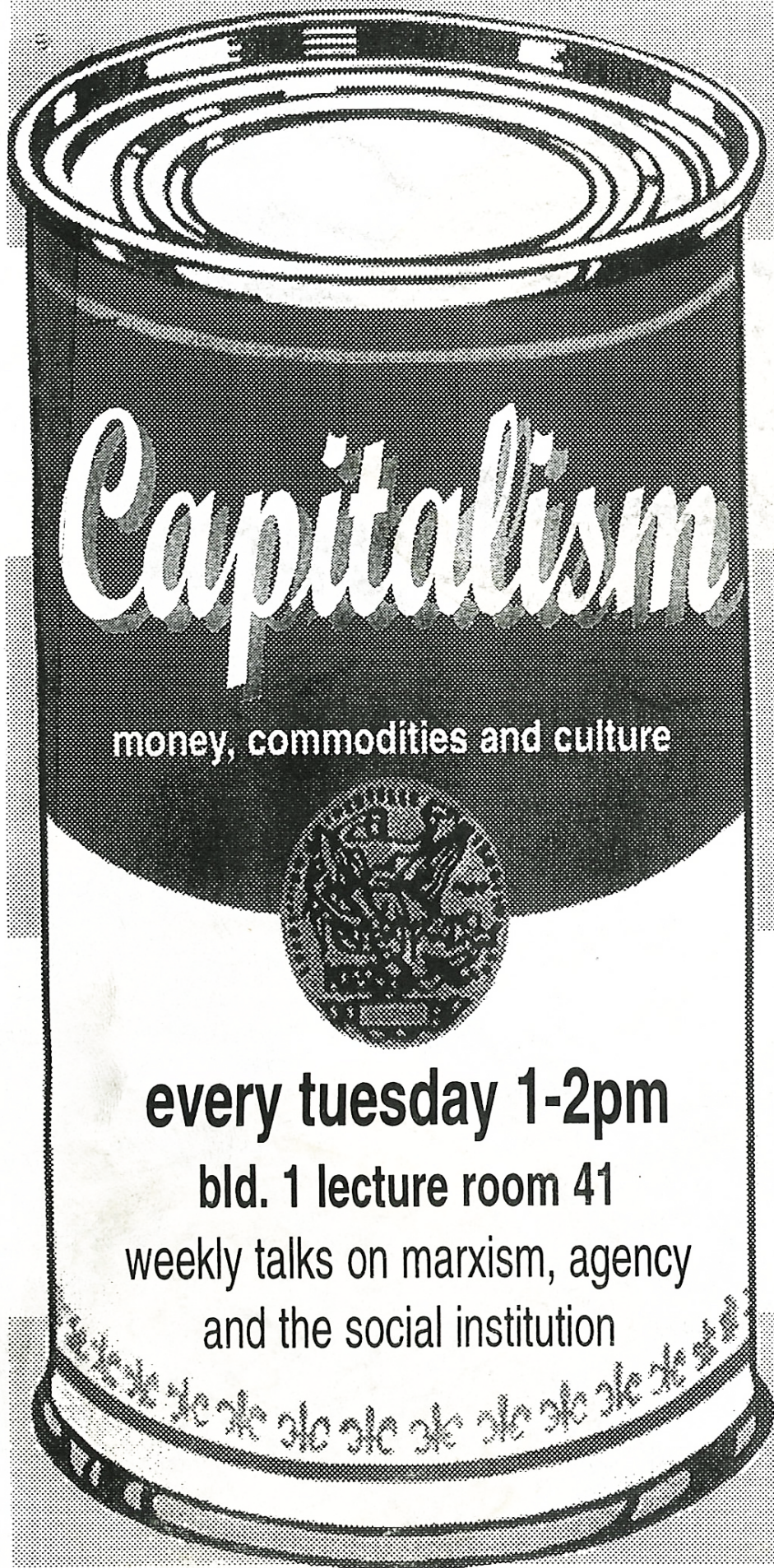
“In the absence of certainties, it is enough to act *as if*. This is the new mould in which the belief is cast: as if growth would save jobs, as if the liberalization and deregulation of markets were to everyone’s benefit, as if States were sovereign, as if election promises were serious, as if ethnic differences were a sufficient explanation for genocide, as if economic rationality were universal, as if today’s ills carried the seeds of tomorrow’s happiness... All everyone has to do is act *as if*; as if ‘development’ were generalisable, as if foreign debt could be repaid, as if it were possible for the poor countries to catch up with the rich, as if limitless growth could be kept up in the long run. As if the virtual could triumph over the real...”

It is time to acknowledge, deep within ourselves, that solidarity, success and security are not symmetrical with material over-abundance and exponential growth in profits, and in fact greed, in all its thousand guises is that which now most needs to be rejected. For how will people tomorrow judge our age? Who can say... But we must always pose the question, so that the imagination can be called into struggle against that which appears self-evident.

take
control



'the commodity is a very fetish thing'



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